A Note on the Preservation of Georgia History

By Richard Barksdale Harwell*

Two outstanding additions to the bibliographical tools of the Southern historian raise the question: What are Georgia libraries doing to preserve the history of the state, or – to put the question more pointedly – what are the people of Georgia, through their libraries and other educational institutions, doing to preserve the history of the state? *Guide to Manuscript Collections in the Duke University Library*, prepared by Nannie M. Tilley and Noma Lee Goodwin,[1] and *Travels in the Confederate States: A Bibliography*, by E. Merton Coulter[2] describe in their pages much material of vital importance to the historians of Georgia.

More than a century ago the state of Georgia made a good beginning toward the acquisition and preservation of historical manuscripts. In 1824 the General Assembly appropriated four hundred dollars for the publication of manuscript and printed records relating to the history of the state.[3] In 1837 a legislative resolution authorized the Rev. Charles Wallace Howard as agent "to repair to London, for the purpose of procuring the colonial records, or copies thereof, now in the colonial departments of Great Britain, that relate to the history and settlement of this state."[4] Two years later, on June 4, 1839, the Georgia Historical Society was organized at Savannah. In a three-page circular dated June 26, 1839, the Library Committee of the Society requested contributions of material from its patrons. "The Committee would respectfully state," concludes the circular, "that while in the above specifications, they have regarded merely their own State, yet they by no means wish to limit the dona-

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1. Nannie M. Tilley and Noma Lee Goodwin. *Guide to the manuscript collections in the Duke University library.* (Historical papers of the Trinity College historical society, series XXVII-XXVIII) Durham, N. C., Duke University press, 1947. Pp. viii, 362.

2 E. Merton Coulter. *Travels in the Confederate States: A Bibliography.* Norman, University of Oklahoma press, 1948. Pp. xiv, 289 (American exploration and travel, v. 2)

3. *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society* (Savannah, 1840), I (1840), viii.

4. *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

tions to, or collections of the Society, to topics purely local in their interest. They solicit contributions of books, manuscripts, pamphlets, newspapers, and everything which can elucidate the history of America generally, as well as Georgia in particular; and they sincerely hope that this call upon the liberality of all who love the honor of our commonwealth, and desire to perpetuate the faithful records of her existence, will be responded to, with an ardor that will insure the complete success of the GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY."[5]

The Civil War undoubtedly did much to destroy existing files of manuscripts and existing libraries in Georgia. Its effect was widened in that it destroyed for many Georgians whose tastes might so have inclined them the means to collect the materials of history into private libraries. The first library collected by Charles Colcock Jones, Jr., who later amassed a splendid collection of Georgiana, was destroyed by Sherman's soldiers. Godfrey Barnsley of Bartow county was turned from his ambition to build his home and his library on the grand scale by the fortunes of war.

Prior to the war the state had had at least two splendid private libraries in the collections of Alexander Augustus Smets and Israel Keech Tefft, both of Savannah. Mr. Smets' library was described in a seven-page article in *The Southern Literary Messenger* for October-November 1851.[6] In 1860 a hundred-and-four-page catalog of a portion of the collection was published by J. M. Cooper & company of Savannah.[7] But in 1868, after the death of Mr. Smets, the library was sold outside the state. The two catalogs describing the sales of the books and of the manuscript collection are now rarities themselves.[8] A year earlier the "entire collection of autographs of the late Mr. I. K. Tefft" was sold by the auction firm of Leavitt, Strebigh & Co. in New York.[9] Mr. Tefft had such an outstanding collection of autographs that it is yet possible to trace many of the items that belonged to him through suc-

5. *Ibid.*, 305.
6. *The Southern Literary Messenger* (Richmond), XVII (Oct.-Nov., 1851), 630-36.
7. Alexander Augustus Smets. *Catalogue Raissone of the Curious Manuscripts Early Printed and other Rare Books, Comprising Part of the Library of Mr. A. A. Smets* (Savannah, 1860), 104 p.
8. *Catalogue of the private collection of autographs of the late Mr. A. A. Smets* (New York, 1868), 59; *Catalogue of the private library of the late Mr. A. A. Smets* (New York, 1868), 300 p.
9. *Catalogue of the entire collection of autographs of the late Mr. I. K. Tefft* (New York, 1867), 264 p.

cessive owners to their present and permanent resting places in some of the great historical collections of the East.

After the war a new generation interested in Georgia's past emerged. Chief among these was Charles Colcock Jones, Jr. Jones' collection was partially dispersed after his death. Many of the finest – autograph letters and documents of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the members of the Continental Congress, letters of Georgia's colonial governors, etc. – were purchased by Dr. Thomas Addis Emmett of New York. Jones' library and portions of his collection of manuscripts remained in the possession of his family until only a few years ago. They are now out of the state.

Wymberley Jones DeRenne put together the most widely known collection of Georgiana. Fortunately, this collection is now a part of the library of the University of Georgia. At the same time Keith Read, a Chatham county neighbor of DeRenne, was amassing an enviable collection of Confederate material. The Read collection is now at Emory University.

Contemporary with Jones was Governor Allen D. Candler who, like Howard, "repaired to London" and collected much of our colonial records. These records were published by the state as *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia* and were supplemented by the compilation of *The Revolutionary Records of the State of Georgia* and *The Confederate Records of the State of Georgia.* Since the days of Governor Candler the state has done little to further the collection or publication of historical data. The gift of the Rhodes Memorial Hall has not been augmented; the State Library has expanded its services beyond its original function and has outgrown its quarters. Both greatly need increased help – not only from the legislature but also from the people of the state. The functions of the State Department of Archives and History and of the State Library are benefits that the people of the state should not deny themselves.

While Georgians have neglected their past, agencies outside the state have preserved for us much of our history. It is inconvenient, of course, to the Georgia student to have to travel to Duke University, the University of North Carolina, the Library of Congress, the Western Reserve Historical Society (Cleveland), or the University of Wisconsin to be able to use materials directly connected with the history of his own state. But it must

be remembered that if these out-of-state institutions had not preserved the materials of Georgia history a large percentage of them might now be altogether lost. It is in this connection that the guide to the manuscript collections of the Duke University Library is of particular interest to Georgians. It is impossible here to go into a full description of the guide. In 1,896 entries Miss Tilley and Miss Goodwin have described a manuscript collection aggregating more than a million pieces plus some three thousand bound volumes. And even this it not the total of the Duke collection. Nearly half as much more material has not yet been catalogued. Although nominally started more than a half century ago, the Duke collection received great impetus in 1924 by the establishment of the George Washington Flowers Memorial Fund. Administered by Dr. W. K. Boyd until his death in 1938 and since then by Dr. R. H. Woody, the Flowers fund has brought to Duke material which has made it possible for that institution to move to the forefront in the study of Southern history.

Although the total number of Georgia manuscripts in the Duke collection is far below the number for Virginia, North Carolina, or even South Carolina,[10] the Duke manuscript department includes many collections of importance to Georgians. In the following list of collections relating specifically to Georgia – a list divested of the illuminating descriptive notes provided by the compilers – is a recapitulation of the chief Georgia collections at Duke. The total number of pieces represented by these twenty-five collections comprises 34,325 of the 36,999 items relating to Georgia and 208 of the 252 bound volumes relating to the state.

Adam Leopold Alexander papers, 1785-1909. 361 items. Washington, Ga.

Godfrey Barnsley papers, 1828-1873. 3,660 items and 1 vol. Savannah, Ga.

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10. Dr. E. G. Swem in his review article in *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LVI, 221-29, gives the following figures for the Duke collections: Virginia (including West Virginia) 279,904 pieces and 1,305 bound volumes; North Carolina 184,101 pieces and 1,495 volumes; South Carolina 44,473 pieces and 194 volumes; Georgia 18,975 pieces and 226 volumes; Alabama 13,234 pieces and 64 volumes; Tennessee 5,472 pieces and 3 volumes; Mississippi 1,468 pieces and 44 volumes; Louisiana 1,635 pieces and 21 volumes; Florida 4 pieces and 1 volume; Arkansas 339 pieces and 1 volume; Maryland 1,849 pieces and 10 volumes; and Kentucky 984 pieces and 4 volumes. It will be noted that the number of pieces relating to Georgia has been considered quite a bit higher by this writer. The discrepancy is accounted for in such listings as those of Sidney Lanier and Paul Hamilton Hayne which are quoted later.

Thomas Holley Chivers papers, 1833-1859. 634 items. Washington, Ga.

Howell Cobb papers, 1848-1868. 39 items. Athens, Ga.

William Harris Crawford papers, 1790-1867. 113 items. Crawford, Ga.

Alfred Cumming papers, 1792-1889. 755 items and 9 vols. Georgia and Utah.

Jefferson Howard De Votie papers, 1834-1871. 120 items. Columbus, Ga.

Samuel Elbert account book, 1776-1788. 1 vol. Georgia.

William Few papers, 1796, 1805. 2 items. New York and Georgia.

Franklin county miscellaneous records, 1790-1881. 750 items. Franklin county, Ga.

Greene county records, 1787-1889. 488 items and 83 vols. Greene county, Ga.

Edward Harden papers, 1772-1930. 2,013 items and 12 vols. Athens, Ga.

Paul Hamilton Hayne papers, 1815-1927. 4,579 items and 31 vols. Charleston, S. C., and Columbia county, Ga.

James Jackson papers, 1782-1799. 11 items. Savannah, Ga.

Charles Colcock Jones Jr. papers, 1861-1893. 153 items and 61 vols. Savannah, Ga.

John McIntosh Kell papers, 1841-1889. 109 items and 3 vols. Darien, Ga.

Sidney Lanier papers, 1857-1906. 50 items. Baltimore, Md.

Eugenius Aristides Nisbet papers, 1804-1934. 15,000 items and 5 vols. Macon, Ga.

Savannah port papers, 1820-1870. 4,758 items and 2 vols. Savannah, Ga.

Edward Telfair papers, 1773-1839. 68 items. Savannah, Ga.

Richard Tubman papers, 1753-1858. 135 items. Augusta, Ga.

Harman Verelst papers, 1741-1743. 17 items. Georgia and London, England.

Aaron Wilbur papers, 1837-1919. 126 items. Savannah, Ga.

Richard Henry Wilde papers, 1812-1843. 19 items. Augusta, Ga.

Wilkes county court papers, 1779-1845. 275 items. Wilkes county, Ga.

Although manuscripts must of necessity exist as unique items, this is not true of published accounts. How, then, has Georgia fared in the preservation of its printed history by its libraries? With this question in mind Dr. Coulter's *Travels in the Confederate States* is of special interest even beyond the interest intrinsic in the volume. The first publication in a new series of "American Exploration and Travel," Dr. Coulter's bibliography lists the books which give a first-hand account of life in the Confederate States as seen by foreign travellers, by Federal soldiers, by Confederate soldiers, and by civilians both Northern and Southern. From the almost unlimited mass of reminiscences, regimental histories, prison narratives, diaries, etc., etc., he has selected 492 items which cover the story of the Confederate South in the manner of the traveller. It is in the Confederate phase of Southern history that the people of the South have exhibited the most interest. How much of the material in *Travels in the Confederate States* has been preserved for them by Georgia libraries?

With the Union Catalog of the Atlanta-Athens Area[11] as an index, Dr. Coulter's volume has been checked to find just what titles there listed are available in some of the chief libraries of the state. Of the 492 items recorded the Emory University Library has 252, the Library of the University of Georgia has seventy-seven, the Carnegie Library of Atlanta has sixty-two, and the Atlanta University Library has twenty-four. The libraries of Agnes Scott, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Columbia Theological Seminary are logically more restricted in their interests. These libraries have eight, seven, and four of the 492 titles respectively. Emory holds 138 titles not held by any of the other libraries cooperating in the maintenance of the Union Catalog; Carnegie of Atlanta four; the University of Georgia fifteen, Atlanta University one, and Columbia Theological Seminary one.

It may be argued that figuring on the basis of the entire bibliography is unfair, that books relating to some parts of the South are not of any particular interest to the study of Georgia history.

11. The Union Catalog of the Atlanta-Athens Area was set up by the University Center Development of the Southeast under a grant from the General Education Board. It is a continuing project which lists on cards all the volumes in the participating libraries and locates copies in the different collections. It has been prepared in duplicate with a copy at the Emory University Library and a copy at the University of Georgia Library. Participating libraries include those of the University of Georgia, Emory University, Agnes Scott College, Columbia Theological Seminary, Atlanta University, Georgia Institute of Technology, the Carnegie Library of Atlanta, and several smaller libraries of specialized interests.

There is the obvious answer that books relating to any part of the South are of integral importance in the study of even a fairly restricted area of the South. Such an argument, of course, carried to its logical conclusion would demand that every library duplicate the universality of the holdings of the Library of Congress, a manifest impossibility. But few things are carried to an ultimate logical conclusion. In any case, we must first collect that which is most pertinent to our needs and then broaden our interests.

Dr. Coulter lists in his index 219 items under the heading "Georgia." Of these Emory has 105, the University of Georgia forty-four, and Carnegie of Atlanta forty. Of these 219 items 105 — exactly the number held by the library having most — are not held by any of the cooperating institutions. Or to narrow the field further — to volumes relating directly to Atlanta: out of fifty-five items Emory has fifteen, Carnegie of Atlanta eight, and the University of Georgia seven. Twenty-five titles relating directly to Atlanta are not located by the Union Catalog.

This analysis of the libraries represented is obviously a quantitative one. It must be admitted that a qualitative study would be somewhat more favorable. The most widely read and respected volumes are, in general, the ones which are in the Georgia libraries. It is not, however, always to the most widely read and respected volumes that the historian must turn in search of the information he needs.

What is necessary for a return to the respect for our own history that motivated the General Assembly in its appropriations of over a century ago? After less than a year of existence the Georgia Historical Society could say of itself: "The spirit which animates its members is one of enlightened zeal and perservering labor."[12] It is with that spirit that not only the Society but all of the educational institutions of the state must "call upon the liberality of all who love the honor of our commonwealth, and desire to perpetuate the faithful records of her existence. . . ."[13]

12. *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society*, I, xii.
13. *Ibid.*, 305.